

Luke 24:36-49

³⁶As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷But they were terrified and frightened and thought they were looking at a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, "Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While they still did not believe it (because of their joy), and while they were still wondering, he said to them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. ⁴³He took it and ate in front of them. ⁴⁴He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms." ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶He said to them, "This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Sermon for Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2020 St. Paul's, Green Garden, MI

Text: Luke 24:36-49

Theme: "Locked Doors are Useless"

In the name of Jesus, who lives to take away our fears, Dear Christian friends,

Some of us may know someone who has had property stolen or their homes broken into. When something like that happens to someone we know, and especially if it should happen to us or a family member, it really makes us alert and cautious doesn't it? Every night I faithfully lock the doors of our home before I go to bed. I turn deadbolts and lock window latches. Each of you likely take similar precautions for the safety of your family and your property. But will all our cautious actions prevent thieves and attackers from getting into our homes and stealing our property or harming us and our loved ones? If it hasn't happened to you it has happened to someone you know. Even in a relatively peaceful community, we live with some fear of theft and vandalism in the back of our minds. Most of us know that no matter what we do, if someone wants to get into our homes, **locked doors are useless**. And now, we have one more thing causing us concern—the corona virus. No locked door will keep that out of our homes. Locked doors are useless.

That is just what Jesus' disciples found out. They had many fears. From Maundy Thursday all the way to Easter evening they were dealing with fear. Jesus was dead. It looked like his enemies were the winners. Would they all die, too? Did God have another Savior in mind for sinners? The doors they counted on for protection and a place to hide from their enemies could not lock out their

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fears. Some of them were consumed with fear. They could hardly think of anything else. They had tunnel vision. So Jesus in his wonderful, patient love for them demonstrated that locked doors are useless, not only for locking out our fears, but also for locking out the risen Jesus. Our Risen Savior wants us to apply these striking truths to our own fears, as individuals and as a congregation.

Luke's account shows us that the disciples were scared that first Easter evening. Reports kept trickling in all day. Various people were supposed to have seen the risen Jesus. But the disciples only saw outward reasons to fear. Jesus' enemies had crucified him. They had proved their political power to get rid of anyone who challenged them. They surely wondered whether these enemies would capture and kill all the disciples, too. What added even more to their fears was that the man they had trusted to be their redeemer was dead. Never mind that he had told them he would rise. They had seen him die. And that just poured gasoline on the fire of fear that burned inside them.

They were guilty of dismissing God's promises, in effect, chasing them out the door. Imagine you are spending a few days in a small cabin with mom and dad and all the children and your family dog, at the end of a gravel road in the U.P. Early one morning the dog starts barking frantically. You can hear a huge, black, hairy creature gnawing and clawing at the door because he's hungry and he smells your food. Now would you let the dog out in order to protect you from the bear? No, because you know if the dog goes out the bear is sure to get in. But that is what we do sometimes. We easily let the fear to come into our lives and we let God's promises out the door of our lives where they can't do any good. Since we know Jesus had told the disciples that He would rise from the dead he may have pointed them to psalm 16 from the pen of David: "**My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.**" Or he may have directed them to Isaiah 53: "**After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many.**" But the disciples certainly weren't thinking about those promises on Easter evening. If they had been they would not have reacted in fear and disbelief to the reports of Jesus' resurrection. "**When the [women] came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ... But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.**"

They show us their fear quite openly when Jesus appeared among them. "**As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."** ³⁷ "**But they were terrified and frightened and thought they were looking at a ghost.**" You can just see the color drain out of their faces and their knees begin to knock when Jesus appears with them behind locked doors. How could someone get in there with them? They had been so careful to protect themselves. Fear enters with a roar and they almost push God's promises out the door. In their frightened state they

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nearly lock faith out of their hearts. At this point they are not even thinking they need Jesus. They are just thinking of how they can get relief from the fearful situation. But you see, faith does not function well in a climate of fear.

And you know what is so tragic? WE, you and I, create the climate of fear, not Jesus. We let God's promises out the door. Would we rather live in fear than in the power of God's promises? I know that you are God's people and I really believe that you want to live your life trusting God's promises. But you and I are guilty of the sin of giving in to fear. We try to lock the door on fear with our weak, human efforts to solve problems which we ourselves have made. We often fail to believe that God's power to help us is much greater than we can imagine.

God can easily solve any challenge in our lives with one stroke of his power including, if we are stricken by any illness, or if financial challenges beset us. But perhaps he wants us each to consider, how important our Lord's ministry is in our community. Perhaps he wants us each to ask and answer in our own hearts, how important is the soul of my neighbor, who if he dies tonight, will spend a horrible eternity in hell?" We may very well worry about the health effects and the financial effect of the lockdown on our community, our state and our country. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves, how would God have me use this situation to reach out to my neighbor with the good news of God's promises in Jesus.

From 2003 to 2018 our synod faced millions of dollars in budget deficits. Missionaries had to be recalled from foreign fields. There was no money to open new mission congregations in our own country to find the lost tell them about our risen Savior. Does our Lord have the power to help our congregation this time of earthly uncertainty? Did not our Lord bring our synod back to a point where we are once again able to open 10 to 20 new mission congregations in a year? Look at the past and see how God has kept his promises. And when you look to the future, remember, we cannot see what will happen, but our God has each of us in the palm of his hand taking care of us individually. You and I need not be afraid to give of our earthly income generously and sacrificially. When you do that you are truly giving your heart to him. As he has promised *and proved* even to the present, the Lord knows those who belong to him. That is more than a pious platitude. It is simple trust in the promises of our loving God who raised his Son from the dead to give us life.

We know from our own experiences and we have seen in the case of the disciples that when you let God's promises out the door, fear comes slithering in and takes over in our hearts. But what a blessing to hear that even when fear grabs hold of the doorknob Jesus' promises can smother fear and remove it from our hearts.

Look at the truth of Jesus' resurrection. It is visible proof that he keeps his promises. The locked doors could not keep him from giving the disciples his full assurance. **He said to them, "Why are you troubled? Why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me**

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and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.”

The visible evidence all by itself spoke volumes. Here were the very hands and feet of the Son of God who had been crucified. There was no doubt because they could still see the nail wounds. And when he showed them his hands and feet he certainly did not want their old doubts to come creeping back to their minds later. He must have strongly urged them to touch him. Because Jesus is a gracious Savior He wants us to have every necessary proof. He wants to strengthen our weak faith. He ate real food right in front of his disciples, something a spirit surely could never do.

All this visible evidence that Jesus is alive meant that the truth could not be locked out of their room. As the disciples were soon going to find out, everything God tells us is truth. Jesus, the true God had told them he would rise from the dead. Though the disciples' fears were great they could not change the truth by their fears. When a soldier goes into battle he understandably has fears about many things. He may have superior weapons. But his fears may cause him to question how well those weapons will protect him. Yet his fears don't change the fact that he has superior weaponry that can do great damage to the enemy. The disciples' fears did not change the fact that Jesus had completely defeated the enemy. Now it would be very important that they take all of Jesus' truth into their own hearts.

When we lock our doors we want to keep out things that can harm us. But we can also keep out things that give us joy. If the mailman comes to the door with a box full of Christmas gifts from Grandpa and Grandma, but the door is locked and you don't answer it, you deprive yourself of the joy that those gifts could give you. But locked doors could not keep out the peace that Jesus brought for his disciples. **As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”** His resurrection was proof to them that God loved them. They did not have to be terrified before God though they knew their sins deserved to be punished. God the Father had punished his son in their place. Now they had real peace with God. My dear friends, Jesus' resurrection means that you, too, have peace with God. He shows you his hands and feet, too. His resurrection locks fear and doubt and distrust out of your heart. That is so important for living your Christian life.

If we are living with fears about our sins, if we question the power of Jesus resurrection in our lives, how will we carry out the assignment that He gives us? This is why Jesus wants you to know your sins are forgiven. This is why he calms your fears. This is why he shows us his hands and his feet. We have marching orders for the rest of our lives. **“Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [Jesus] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”** If you and I have fears, if we have doubts and we are Christians can you imagine how many people in this world are terrorized by the fear of death, by the fear that they will face hell for eternity?

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But friends, you and I know the truth. We have it to share. You're afraid you say? People won't listen, people won't believe, friends will turn away? But do you know that you can't lock out the power that Jesus sent for his disciples and for you. "**Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.**" When Jesus sent his disciples out to tell the world about him they were just the first line of troops sent out to tell the good news. You and I are in the line up right now. Jesus gave his disciples and you the Holy Spirit to give you the energy, power and love to witness about him. You see, you can't lock out Jesus or his love. His love gives you the power to GO, the power to GIVE, the power to LOVE others. The more we follow his assignment, the more he proves to us that obeying him is the only way to live.

Locked doors were useless on the first Easter. We're much like the disciples. We allow fear to have its way in our hearts. But all those fears are powerless against Jesus' truth and peace and love. When your sins are distressing you, then remember that you can't lock out Jesus. You can't lock out his forgiveness, and his strength, you cannot lock out the confidence his love gives you to serve him courageously. Live and act like the forgiven child of God you are. Amen.